

Class Angela Dees, and her son, Christopher, reached out to my office to share their story.

Regrettably, their story is not unique, and they are not alone. To date, nearly 100 wards and foster children were initially approved by the Department of Defense for the transfer of GI education benefits, and money was paid out to their schools. Then, midsemester, the Department of Veterans Affairs revoked their benefits. The students and their families were notified that they would have to repay tuition expenses.

These families now face unexpected and crippling debts. They aren't just stuck with bigger loan payments but with outstanding bills. In many cases, the students even had to drop out of school.

Children of the men and women who serve honorably should not be denied the benefits that they were promised because of bureaucratic oversight. These servicemen and -women have honored the promise that they made to serve our country, and we need to honor the promises we make to them.

This legislation would correct this discrepancy and prevent this situation from happening in the future. Doing so would allow foster children and wards like Christopher, who were approved for GI education benefits only to have them revoked, to receive the education funding that they were promised.

I urge my colleagues to join me and vote "yes" on this critical piece of legislation.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS), my good friend, a tireless working member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I know of no one on our committee who works harder for veterans, whether it is on PTSD or the benefits they have earned, than GUS BILIRAKIS.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Madam Speaker, I thank the ranking member and the chairman. I appreciate them working with us on this very good bill. Also, Chairman LEVIN, who is not here at the time, does an outstanding job, and I look forward to working with him on many more bills.

Madam Speaker, as Ranking Member ROE just mentioned, one of the most important jobs of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs is defending and protecting programs like the GI Bill that continue to provide life-changing education and training benefits to our Nation's veterans and servicemembers. I am proud that provisions in H.R. 4625 will continue this goal and are a by-product of several bipartisan hearings that I have led with Chairman LEVIN to improve oversight of the GI Bill.

I am also pleased that this package includes all the provisions from my bill, H.R. 4085, the Student Veteran Empowerment Act. My bill is designed to limit overpayment of GI Bill funds to students and schools, improve oversight of the GI Bill program by VA and

State approving agencies, and, most importantly, extend the restoration of entitlement for student veterans impacted by school closures.

This last section extends benefits we originally provided to a limited number of students in the Forever GI Bill to all students. It extends to all students; that is important. It is critical to ensure that a student's entitlement is not lost when a school closes or is disapproved before the student completes their education.

My provisions in this bill would make important structural improvements regarding GI Bill oversight and accountability. These changes are important so that we can do all we can to prevent unnecessary school closures and ensure that a student's hard-earned benefits are used on training and education programs that will set up the veteran for long-term economic success.

Again, like Dr. ROE, I thank the veterans service organizations for their advice and suggestions, especially Veterans Education Success.

I also thank the bill's sponsor, as I said before, the chairman of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, my friend from California, MIKE LEVIN. It has been my distinct pleasure, as the ranking member, to work with him on this bill and on other issues that come before our subcommittee. He is a thoughtful legislator, and I thank him for including the provisions of my bill in this legislation before us.

I urge passage of this great bill, H.R. 4625.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Let me just say that this bill, the Protect the GI Bill Act, contains so many elements offered by both sides of the aisle. I have to point out, for the RECORD, the coincidence of having the interests of foster children being protected by a man named BILL FOSTER. There are not enough people in here to get that joke, but I thought that was worth pointing out.

The language in this bill also contains enhancements to the authorities of State approving agencies. One of the broken parts of how our schools, our for-profit schools or all schools, get approved, get their programs approved, is because our State approving agencies lack sufficient authority to intervene when they know that a certain for-profit operation that has had a shady history is about to open in their State. This legislation would allow a State approving agency to act before a bad-acting for-profit school is actually charged, formally charged.

Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I am prepared to close. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I, too, am ready to close. I yield myself the balance of my time.

I do want to say that this bill is indicative of how, when we work to-

gether, we can solve problems. You heard various issues from both sides of the aisle that were brought to bear and worked in the subcommittee and committee to solve these problems for constituents all across the country.

Madam Speaker, I encourage all Members to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 4625, as amended. Indeed, both sides of the aisle worked carefully together, and I am pleased to recommend that we pass this bill on suspension. I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SABLAN. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4625, the Protect the GI Bill Act, which restores education benefits for veterans impacted by recent for-profit school closures and provides the VA additional tools to keep schools who violate the terms of their GI Bill funding accountable.

For the past 75 years, the VA estimates the GI Bill has helped more than 25 million veterans and their families nationwide including the Marianas achieve their educational and career goals.

In recent years however, closures of several for-profit schools have left many veterans with degrees and credits that are not recognized or transferable and facing serious hardships from diminished GI Bill funds that also help pay for housing and other living expenses.

The Protect the GI Bill Act would help the victims of school closures by reinstating lost benefits and barring schools who do not meet quality standards for receiving GI Bill funds. Under H.R. 4625, schools would also be required to inform veterans of the actual cost of attendance including how much their benefits cover, as well as graduation and job placement rates. The bill requires VA and State Approving Agencies to take swift action on schools in violation of GI Bill requirements including suspension of new enrollments as well as bans on deceptive practices like automatic re-enrollment without the veteran's permission.

Passage of H.R. 4625 is critical to preventing future victims of school closures and ensuring veterans and their eligible family members receive a quality education for their hard-earned GI Bill benefits.

I thank the gentleman from California, Mr. LEVIN, for his leadership on this legislation and urge my colleagues to support H.R. 4625.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4625, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

REDUCING HIGH RISK TO VETERANS AND VETERANS SERVICES ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4477) to direct the Secretary

of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a plan to address certain high risk areas identified by the Comptroller General of the United States regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs in the 2019 High-Risk List of the Government Accountability Office, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.
The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4477

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Reducing High Risk to Veterans and Veterans Services Act”.

SEC. 2. REPORT AND PLANNED ACTIONS OF THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO ADDRESS CERTAIN HIGH-RISK AREAS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) **REPORT REQUIRED.**—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Comptroller General of the United States, shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report outlining the plan the Secretary has developed and the actions the Secretary has taken to address the areas of concern identified by the Comptroller General for the Department of Veterans Affairs in the 2019 High-Risk List of the Government Accountability Office (GAO-19-157SP) regarding—

- (1) acquisition management; and
- (2) managing risks and improving health care.

(b) **ELEMENTS.**—The report under subsection (a) shall include each of the following:

(1) Root causes of the areas of concern described in paragraphs (1) and (2) of subsection (a).

(2) Corrective actions and specific steps to address each root cause, including—

(A) the progress of the Secretary in implementing those actions and steps; and

(B) timelines and milestones the Secretary determines feasible to complete each corrective action.

(3) Resources the Secretary determines are necessary to implement corrective actions, including—

- (A) funding;
- (B) stakeholders;
- (C) technology; and
- (D) senior officials responsible for implementing the corrective actions and reporting results.

(4) Metrics for assessing progress in addressing the areas of concern described in paragraphs (1) and (2) of subsection (a).

(5) Key outcomes that demonstrate progress in addressing the areas of concern described in paragraphs (1) and (2) of subsection (a).

(6) Obstacles to implementation of the plan that the Secretary identifies.

(7) Recommendations of the Secretary regarding legislation or funding the Secretary determines necessary to implement the plan.

(8) Any other information the Secretary determines is relevant to understanding the progress of the Department toward the removal of the areas of concern from the High Risk List.

(c) ANNUAL UPDATES.—

(1) **UPDATE REQUIRED.**—Not less than once each year during the implementation period under paragraph (2), the Secretary shall submit to Congress an update regarding implementation of each element of the plan under subsection (b).

(2) **IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD.**—The implementation period described in this paragraph begins on the date on which the Secretary submits the report required under subsection (a) and ends on the earlier of the following dates:

(A) The date on which the Comptroller General removes the last area of concern for the De-

partment from the most recent High-Risk List of the Government Accountability Office.

(B) The date that is eight years after the date on which the Secretary submits the plan required under subsection (a).

SEC. 3. ANNUAL REPORT BY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES PERTAINING TO DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) **ANNUAL REPORT REQUIRED.**—Not later than 270 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, and not less than once during each of the subsequent three years, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives and to the Comptroller General of the United States a report on the implementation of priority recommendations of the Comptroller General that pertain to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(b) **CONTENTS.**—Each report submitted under subsection (a) shall include, for the period covered by the report, the following:

(1) The progress of the Secretary in implementing all open priority recommendations of the Comptroller General for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(2) An explanation for each instance where the Secretary has decided not to implement, or has not fully implemented, an open priority recommendation of the Comptroller General for the Department.

(3) A summary of the corrective actions taken and remaining steps the Secretary plans to take to implement open priority recommendations of the Comptroller General.

(c) **SUPPLEMENT NOT SUPPLANT CERTAIN REQUIRED REPORTS OR WRITTEN STATEMENTS.**—The report under this section shall not be construed to supplant any report or written statement required under section 720 of title 31, United States Code.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVID P. ROE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on H.R. 4477, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4477, as amended, the Reducing High Risk to Veterans and Veterans Services Act.

The Government Accountability Office provides important oversight across the Federal Government. As Congress’ investigative arm, GAO audits and examines Department of Veterans Affairs programs and spending. The Comptroller General and his staff provide hundreds of recommendations on how to improve services and benefits. However, too often, GAO recommendations are ignored by the Department.

H.R. 4477, as amended, is bipartisan legislation offered by the Sub-

committee on Oversight and Investigations’ Chairman PAPPAS and Ranking Member BERGMAN that seeks to address, in a systematic manner, GAO’s most notable and important findings and recommendations.

The act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to develop a plan to address the two areas within VA identified as high risk by the Government Accountability Office. These are the Veterans Health Administration and acquisition management.

Every 2 years, the Government Accountability Office releases its High-Risk List of Federal Government programs most vulnerable to fraud, waste, abuse, or mismanagement.

Included in 2015, the Veterans Health Administration, the largest healthcare system in the country, remains on GAO’s 2019 list.

This was the first year that VA acquisition management was placed on the High-Risk List as a result of inefficient use of acquisition funding and staffing resources, as well as numerous contracting challenges. VA’s acquisition management is vital to VA’s functioning because of its role in medical supplies procurement and construction, both of which relate directly to VA’s ability to serve veterans and provide quality medical care.

The Reducing High Risk to Veterans and Veterans Services Act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to develop a plan to address the two areas within VA identified as high risk by the Government Accountability Office.

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This plan will address the root causes of why these programs are at high risk and include specific timelines to correct the problems. VA will report to Congress on progress and ongoing challenges. The Department will also provide their views on whether Congress needs to take legislative action or provide additional resources.

This bill has the support of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the DAV. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise today in support of H.R. 4477, as amended, the Reducing High Risk to Veterans and Veterans Services Act. This bill was introduced by Congressman CHRIS PAPPAS from New Hampshire and my good friend, Congressman JACK BERGMAN from Michigan, the chairman and ranking member, respectively, of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation.

Every 2 years, the Government Accountability Office, the GAO, publishes its High-Risk List identifying those activities that are considered high risk due to their vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement or that need transformation. GAO added managing risks and improving Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare to

its High-Risk List in 2015, and it remains there today.

Last Congress, the committee held a roundtable discussion with representatives from VA and GAO to address VA's progress towards addressing GAO's concerns. While it takes an agency, on average, 7 years to be removed from the list, VA has demonstrated little progress. Additionally, GAO added that VA Acquisition Management to its 2019 list.

H.R. 4477, as amended, would require VA to develop a plan of action to address deficiencies in acquisition management and healthcare that led GAO to place VA on their High-Risk List in 2015 and again in 2017 and again in 2019. It would also incorporate a provision under H.R. 698, a bill introduced by Representative JIM BANKS of Indiana, to direct VA to report on its efforts to address GAO's priority recommendations and GAO's top 30 open recommendations.

Our Nation's veterans and taxpayers deserve a VA that is high performing and that acts quickly to address areas of concern as they arise. This help will help ensure that they get it done.

I am grateful to Congressman PAPPAS and General BERGMAN for sponsoring this bill, which has my full support, but I would be remiss if I did not point out that this is another bill that did not go through regular order.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I am prepared to close.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, it is my privilege to yield as much time as he may consume to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BERGMAN), a lieutenant general—and for those of you all who don't know what that is, it is three stars; I only made it to a major—to describe his bill.

Mr. BERGMAN. Madam Speaker, basically, when you have three stars, it just means you outlasted a lot of folks. But the point is the honor of being able to serve among marines, sailors, soldiers, airmen, and coastguardsmen is enough to make us all swell with pride because, you know, yesterday was Veteran's Day, and it is a real special day thanking the veterans of all wars for their service to our country.

I rise today in support of H.R. 4477, as amended, the Reducing High Risk to Veterans and Veterans Services Act, a bill introduced by Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Chairman CHRIS PAPPAS and co-led by myself.

Every 2 years, GAO publishes its High-Risk List identifying those activities which are considered high risk due to their vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement or their need for transformation. Sometimes things don't always stay the same, and we need to move forward with the change.

As Ranking Member ROE stated, GAO added managing risks and improving VA healthcare to its list in 2015 and

added VA Acquisition Management in 2019. This past May, the Comptroller General of the United States testified before the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, where I am proud to serve as ranking member, concerning the Department's efforts to add GAO recommendations.

Comptroller General Dodaro testified during the hearing: "I want to emphasize hardly any area in the high-risk area gets off the list without sustained congressional oversight, as well, and action by the Congress. The engagement by the Congress is absolutely critical to the success of agencies coming off the High-Risk List."

The intent of this bill is to focus VA on its efforts to remove these two programs from GAO's High-Risk List and give Congress the information needed to provide the sustained congressional oversight the Comptroller General said was absolutely necessary and needed to remove programs from the High-Risk List.

H.R. 4477 was amended in committee to incorporate provisions of H.R. 698, a bill introduced by Representative BANKS, which would require VA to report on its efforts to implement GAO's priority recommendations for VA.

I strongly encourage all Members to support H.R. 4477, as amended.

Mr. DAVID P. ROE of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, I encourage all Members to support the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 4477, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4477, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VA TELE-HEARING MODERNIZATION ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4771) to amend title 38, United States Code, to permit appellants to appear in disability compensation cases before the Board of Veterans' Appeals by picture and voice transmission from locations other than facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4771

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SEC. 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "VA Tele-Hearing Modernization Act".

SECTION 2. HEARINGS BEFORE THE BOARD OF VETERANS' APPEALS BY MEANS OF TELECONFERENCE FROM LOCATIONS OTHER THAN FACILITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 7107(c)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (A), by inserting "or subparagraph (C) of this paragraph" after "subparagraph (B) of such paragraph";

(2) in subparagraph (B), by inserting "or subparagraph (A) of such paragraph"; and

(3) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph (C):

"(C)(i) Upon notification of a Board hearing under subparagraph (A) or (B) of paragraph (1), the appellant may alternatively request a hearing by picture and voice transmission—

"(I) at a location selected by the appellant; and

"(II) via a secure internet platform established and maintained by the Secretary that protects sensitive personal information from a data breach.

"(ii) If an appellant makes a request under clause (i), the Board shall grant such request."

(b) DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION.—The Secretary shall implement the amendments made by subsection (a) not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(c) REPORTING.—

(1) ANNUAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.—Section 7101(d)(2) of such title is amended—

(A) in subparagraph (E), by striking "; and" and inserting a semicolon;

(B) in subparagraph (F), by striking the period at the ending and inserting "; and"; and

(C) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

"(G) with respect to hearings scheduled under section 7107(c)(2)(C) of this title—

"(i) the number of hearings scheduled under such section;

"(ii) the number of hearings under such section that were cancelled; and

"(iii) any statistical difference in outcomes between cases heard under such section and those held at the principal location of the Board or by picture and voice transmission at a facility of the Department."

(2) ONE-TIME REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.—The first report required to be submitted under section 7101(d) of title 38, United States Code, shall include the following information with respect to hearings scheduled under subparagraph (C) of paragraph (2) of subsection (c) of section 7101 of such title, as added by subsection (a):

(A) An outline of the outreach the Secretary of Veterans Affairs plans to conduct to inform veterans, families of veterans, survivors of veterans, veterans service organizations, military service organizations, congressional caseworkers, advocates for veterans, and such other stakeholders as the Secretary considers appropriate about hearings scheduled under such subparagraph, including—

(i) a description of the resources required to conduct such outreach;

(ii) a timeline for conducting such outreach; and

(iii) information related to the advantages and potential technological challenges of conducting hearings under such subparagraph.

(B) A description of any modifications to the information technology systems of the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Board of Veterans' Appeals required to carry out hearings under such subparagraph, including cost estimates and a timeline for making such modifications.

(C) A detailed description of the intra-agency partnership between the Board of Veterans' Appeals and the telehealth program of the Veterans Health Administration as the Board conducts hearings under such subparagraph, including best practices, a risk assessment overview, risk mitigation efforts, and a plan for ongoing collaboration and information sharing.